THE CRIME DEBATE

What you have here is a philosophy exercise. Different fictional characters from different times and eras of human history will come face to face to present their case and defend their positions before a single question: When is it justified to break the law and commit a crime?

While the participants will discuss this, they will not reach a consensus or find an answer. Their weapons will not be their fists, but their rhetoric. It will be your job, the reader, to reach a conclusion of your own.

Since I know that not everyone knows the history and origin story of every single fictional character in the world, there will be a small biography of each participant so you can understand their personal traumas, and their places in history, but will not include any of their beliefs or personal convictions. To understand that, you will need to analyze what they say and argue in the debate. Here they all are in alphabetical order.

Batman: Billionaire Bruce Wayne was just a kid when he saw his parents, Thomas and Martha Wayne, being shot by a mugger in an alley of Gotham City. After this traumatic event, Bruce decided to use his fortune to train his body and mind, as well as getting different gadgets and vehicles, to adopt the identity of Batman, and fight crime in the dark nights, spreading fear in the minds of criminals.

The Black Bat: "The Black Bat" was a character published in pulp magazines in 1939. Tony Quinn was an incorruptible district attorney, and during a high profile trial, a criminal with ties to the mob threw acid on his face while he was being interrogated on the witness stand, leaving Tony blind. A police officer that was dying sent his daughter to talk to Tony to donate his eyes in secret so Tony could see again. After a secret surgery, Tony regains his sight, but keeps it a secret, pretending that he is still blind. To capture the criminals that were too powerful for the law to ever touch, he puts on a black cowl and cape and adopts the identity of The Black Bat during the nights, acting outside the law to make criminals fear him and protect innocent people from harm.

Captain Nemo: A character from "20 thousand leagues under the seas" Captain Nemo is the inventor of the incredible submarine 'Nautilus', Nemo isolated himself completely from the world in the depths of the ocean, where he surfaces from time to time to sink ships adorned with the flag of imperialistic nations, who believe that the attacks are caused by some

undiscovered sea creature. Nemo means “Nobody” in Latin, and it is the name he picked for himself. Inside the Nautilus both Captain Nemo and his loyal crew speak a constructed language invented by Nemo himself, who has completely rejected all civilization from the surface.

Catwoman: Ever since she was a child, Selina Kyle had to learn to survive in the dangerous streets and alleyways of the East End, the poorest neighborhood in Gotham City. An orphan, she learned to steal from a young age, until she finally adopted the secret identity of Catwoman, an agile and silent thief, stalking the rooftops of Gotham City.

Conan the Barbarian: A mighty swordsman from the prehistoric Hyborian Age, Conan is a Cimmerian born in a battlefield. Wandering across the world, untied to any place, Conan has been many things, a warrior, a pirate, a mercenary, always holding his sword and his personal code of honor. Smart and with a great sense of survival, he usually tries to avoid civilized regions.

The Count of Monte Cristo: Edmond Dantès was a young and promising French sailor who was about to be promoted to Captain and marry his fiancée. Falsely accused to being a Bonapartist conspirator by his friends who envied his promotion and his fiancée. Edmond was locked away in the dungeons of the Château d'If for 14 years. While in there he finds out from another prisoner about a large hidden treasure hidden in the island of Montecristo, and after escaping and finding that treasure, he adopts the identity of The Count of Monte Cristo, to plot his perfect revenge against those that ruined his life.

Daredevil: Matt Murdock was born and raised in a poor neighborhood of New York known as Hell’s Kitchen. As a kid, he pushed a blind man out of the way from a moving out-of-control truck that was carrying radioactive waste, however the truck dropped a canister that splashed radioactive waste on Matt’s eyes. This blinded him, but increased all his other senses to the point that he can see using sound like a radar. His father, Jack Murdock, was an old boxer that was murdered by the mob when he refused to lose a fixed match. Seeing how the justice system didn’t do anything to bring the people that did that to justice, Matt adopted the identity of Daredevil to deliver justice at night, while being a young and prolific defense lawyer during the day.

The Domino Lady: “The Domino Lady” is a character published in pulp magazines in 1936. Ellen Patrick was a young socialite from California, graduated from Berkeley University. Her father, Owen Patrick, was a

respected district attorney. While she was traveling abroad, Owen Patrick was murdered by the corrupt political machine, since politicians, police officers and members of high society all orchestrated his assassination. Seeing how the justice system wouldn't investigate her father's murder, Ellen adopted the identity of The Domino Lady. As The Domino Lady, Ellen steals from the corrupt social elite, and then gives most of it away to their victims or to charity, keeping some for herself to finance her operations.

Green Arrow: Oliver Queen was a millionaire, who one day fell from his yacht and washed ashore a deserted island, where he had to learn how to use a bow and arrow to hunt and survive. When he finally was able to return to civilization, he used his newfound skills as an archer to fight crime. However, after a series of frauds caused by his business partners, Oliver lost his entire fortune and was forced to live on the streets where he saw directly how the marginalized and the poor lived every day.

The Green Hornet: Britt Reid is the heir to the vast Reid fortune, which also includes the newspaper "The Daily Sentinel". As owner and chief editor of the newspaper, Britt realized that the police and the judges were unable to do anything against the wave of crime in the city. So he decided to adopt the identity of The Green Hornet, and pretend to be a criminal, being wanted by the police, and so earning the respect of the criminal bosses all over town. The objective being to infiltrate the criminal network, and systematically dismantle it from the inside.

Martin Fierro: From the book of the same name, Martin Fierro was a gaucho that lived in peace at his small ranch in the pampas of Argentina with his wife and kids at the end of the 19th century. However, the laws of the time said that if a gaucho was not employed by a landowner, he was considered a vagrant and so was forced to serve in the army to fight at the frontier against indigenous tribes. After three years of being mistreated by his superiors and never getting paid for his services at the fort, he defects and escapes back to his ranch. However, when he gets there he finds that the place is in ruins, his wife had to go with another man to survive and his children were gone as well. With nothing left, Martin Fierro becomes a fugitive, wanted by the authorities.

The Punisher: Frank Castle is an American Marine and veteran of the Vietnam War. While he and his family were enjoying a picnic at Central Park in New York City, they were the witnesses of an execution by the local mafia. And so as to not to leave any witnesses, the mobsters decided

to kill him and his family too. Frank was only injured and he managed to survive his wounds, but his whole family was dead. When he saw that the justice system was corrupt and unable to condemn the perpetrators, Frank decided to use his military training with fire arms, and lethal force expertise to start a one man personal war against organized crime as The Punisher.

Robin Hood: The Forest Laws imposed by the Normans in medieval England removed all access poor peasants had to the woods, which they needed to hunt for food and gather wood for the winter. What used to be public space now was the private property of the crown. Hunting for food or gathering wood was then a crime punished by mutilation and even death. In that context, the legend of Robin Hood began, an outlaw that stood in defiance against the monopoly of the monarchy over the forest, protecting the starving peasants, stealing from the rich to give to the poor.

The Scarlet Pimpernel: Sir Percy Blakeney was an English baron during the French Revolution. Known in high society as a frivolous man, more interested in fashion than in politics, Blakeney was in secret the Scarlet Pimpernel, a mysterious man that would save French aristocrats from the guillotine during the Reign of Terror, smuggling them out of France, all while being wanted and persecuted by agents of the French Republic.

El Zorro: Don Diego de la Vega is a young Spanish aristocrat, son of Don Alejandro, the wealthiest land owner in all of Los Angeles, in Spanish California. While he was in Spain for his studies, he is called back home by his father, where he finds out that all of California was under the rule of oppressive tyrannical rulers. While Don Diego pretends to be a frivolous dandy that loves poetry and music, in secret he is El Zorro, a courageous outlaw that humiliates the authorities and defends the rights of the oppressed.

And now that you are familiar with the participants, lets the debate begin.

In the top floor of a tall skyscraper in the middle of a great city, in a moonless night and under an intense rain, two bright portals into different dimensions open to let in the first two people that will debate about when is it justified to disobey the law. The nature of the portals make it so every person stepping out already know why they are there, what has already

been said by everyone else before them, and the identities and pasts of the people around them. They are all there to try and find an answer to a single question: When is it justified to break the law, and commit a crime?

The first person to emerge from the portal is a young woman of blonde hair, dressed in an expensive white cocktail silk dress, and a long black cape made of the same material. A black domino mask covers her eyes, and a small .45 caliber revolver can be seen attached to her lace garter belt. She is Ellen Patrick, The Domino Lady.

The second person is another woman, of long black hair, dressed in a skintight black leather suit which covers her whole body from the neck down. A small black headband with cat ears and a black whip on her hips completes the ensemble. She is Selina Kyle, better known as Catwoman.

The Domino Lady: "You know, Selina, I don't consider myself a criminal. I am a tool of justice: The men that I target to steal their fortunes are not victims, they are parasites. Corrupt politicians, and mobsters that the law can't touch. **It is justified to steal from them when the system is too blind to realize that the system itself is rotten**."

Catwoman: "How noble, Ellen. Always with the moral justification. You steal because you call it 'justice' meanwhile I… steal for convenience. And maybe for style. Does the 'why' really matter if at the end of the day we both end with full pockets? **The system is not blind nor is it rotten, Ellen, the system is working exactly like it was designed to do**. And it is designed so that the people on top always win. **I am just leveling the playing field in my favor**."

The Domino Lady: "There is a fundamental difference. I only keep a small part of what I steal, most of it goes back to the victims of those men, or I donate to charity. **My 'crime' is an esthetic repair of order**. If you steal because you want to, or because you are attracted to the sparkle of a diamond, you are just part of the chaos they cause. **Crime is only justified when it is being used to punish the unpunished**."

Catwoman laughs.

Catwoman: "Justice is too big of a word for someone wearing a domino mask. I don't pretend that I'm saving the world, Ellen. The world is sinking on its own. **It is justified to take what you want because tomorrow you might not be around to enjoy it**. If a cat is hungry, and the milk is there, the cat drinks it. There is no malice, it is purely **survival instinct inside a concrete jungle**."

The Domino Lady: “Survival is a bad excuse for egoism, Selina. Without a code, you are just a common thief. **If the final objective isn’t to rid society of its own filth, then what separates us from the monsters we despise?**”

Catwoman: “What separates us is that we are better at it than they are. Look, Ellen, you steal to punish ‘the bad guys’ and so you can feel better with your own conscience. I accept who I am. **It’s justified to commit a crime when the alternative is to be just another victim**. And I refuse to be one.”

The voice of The Domino Lady grows colder.

The Domino Lady: “My father was murdered believing in tribunals and courts, Selina. Owen Patrick was a district attorney that spent his life trying to clean the filth from the inside. And what did he get for his efforts? A bullet paid for by the same men that shared his table at the social club. **When the judges and the police are the ones pulling the trigger, then ‘crime’ is the only court of justice that remains**.”

Catwoman: “I understand your pain, Ellen. **But what you call a ‘corrupt system’ is just human nature without any filters**. Your father was murdered because he tried to impose rules in a place where only power rules. **You use your tragedy as a moral compass; I use mine as a reminder that the only person that will ever take care of me is myself**. In the end, we both know that the law is just a joke, but I don’t need a dead district attorney as permission to laugh at the joke.”

The Domino Lady: “**My resources are a tool, Selina. My education and my family name open doors that my mask cannot enter on its own**. If I use this dress and this domino mask is to remind the pigs that one of their own is hunting them. **My wealth is my armor, Selina, not my sin**.”

Catwoman: “Your silk dress costs more money than what my neighbors see in a year, Ellen. **It’s easy to talk about justice when you have the money to fall back into if things don’t go as planned**. I didn’t have a fancy college, I had the streets of East End. I don’t steal to avenge a name, or to restore anything, I steal so I am not just another statistic, another ‘mouth to feed’.”

The Domino Lady: “You use your talent for your own benefit. I return part of what I steal to the victims or to those in need. **Don’t you see that your origins should give you even more reason to want a more just system, not one that benefits only you?**”

Catwoman: "**A 'just' system is a fairytale for wealthy people**, like you. In my neighborhood in Gotham City, the only justice is having a full stomach and your rent paid. You play at being a hero because you can afford to do so. **I am a thief because that is the only way that Gotham City allows me to exist**."

The dimensional portal opens one more time, a somber figure steps out of it, the air turns heavy as a cape grazes the floor. The distinctive image of a bat can be seen in the chest of the Kevlar tactical armor, and a cowl with bat ears cover his face. Bruce Wayne, Batman, joins the debate.

Batman: "Crime is not a tool for justice, Ellen. And is not a survival instinct either, Selina. **Crime is a choice. A choice that destroys the very fabric of what we try to protect**."

The Domino Lady: "Bruce, you are hypocritical idealist. The armed defender of the status quo. You lost your parents just like I did, and you also wear a mask because the law failed you. But you think you can save the system without breaking it. **With what moral authority can you tell me that stealing from the people responsible for my father's murder is wrong?**"

Batman: "With the authority of someone that knows that vengeance has no end, Ellen. You say that you steal to 'restore justice' but all you do is cause more chaos. My father believed in this city, just as your father believed in his city, but I don't dishonor him by turning into what destroyed it. **If you steal from the corrupt, the money is still dirty. Justice is built with proof, not with thievery**."

Catwoman: "**Says the billionaire that doesn't realize that the 'choice' for some of us is between starving and being 'good'**. You believe Gotham City can heal, Bruce. But I know Gotham City only changes ownership. Ellen has a point, your 'justice' takes too long, and meanwhile the murderers of Ellen's father are still unpunished and the people in East End are still starving and cold. **A diamond stolen from the house of a mobster can feed more people today that one of your bureaucratic charity drives**."

Batman stares at Catwoman.

Batman: "**Feeding someone with the fruit of a crime only teaches them that the law of the strongest is the only one that counts**. That is not freedom, that is dependency to crime."

Catwoman: "**Some don't have the time to wait for someone else's generosity, Bruce**. That isn't freedom either, don't pretend that it's different. Not everyone has a safety net to fall into when they fall down to the ground."

The Domino Lady: "What do you suggest, Bruce? That I wait for a paid judge to sign an arrest warrant that will never come? My father died waiting for the law to work. **I don't commit crimes, I execute sentences that the city is too cowardly to execute itself**."

Batman: "**The moment you decide who loses their fortune based on your own pain, you become in the same corrupt judge that you despise**. I don't decide who lives and who dies based on my pain, Ellen, and that is the difference. **What separates us from them is respecting a norm that is bigger than ourselves. If justice is subjective, then it isn't justice. It is just your will being imposed by force.**"

The dimensional portal opens up once again, and a black Chrysler Imperial can be seen through it. Out of the car and through the portal, a man wearing a green suit and tie, with a green trench coat and fedora hat, and a green mask covering his face. Britt Reid, the Green Hornet, enters the room to join the debate.

The Green Hornet: "Now this is a colorful gathering. The billionaire that plays at being a hero of justice, the cat that steals for sport, and the lady that seeks revenge. Batman, you are too worried about the 'norms'. **But norms don't stop the mobs that operate in broad daylight**."

Batman: "Reid, you play a dangerous game. You pretend to be a criminal to infiltrate the mob, and that puts you in the same bag as them in the eyes of the law."

The Green Hornet: "Exactly. **And that is the only way it will work**. Ellen, you want to 'clean' the system from the outside. Selina, you only want to survive the system. Meanwhile, I use my newspaper, the Daily Sentinel, to expose the truth, and I use my mask so the criminals think I am one of them. **It is justified to break the law if it allows you to destroy organized from its core**. If the mobsters and traffickers believe I'm the biggest criminal in town, they'll come to me. And there is when I make them fall."

The Domino Lady: "What you call justice is a lie wrapped around another lie. If you pretend to be a criminal, then **how do you know that you haven't become what you pretend to fight?**"

Catwoman smiles.

Catwoman: "I must admit that I like his style, Bruce. He doesn't worry about the police liking him or not liking him. **At least Britt accept that, to win the game, one must get their hands dirty**. As Batman you want criminals to fear you, but as The Green Hornet, he wants criminals to trust him. That's clever."

Batman: "No. That is a steep and slippery slope. **If you act like a criminal, then eventually the lines get blurry**. Justice cannot be just a facade."

The Green Hornet: "**Justice is a luxury that cities like Gotham no longer have, Batman**. My father also left me a mogul and a responsibility. I rather have the world hate me, and call me a criminal, if that means I can dismantle a criminal network in a single night, something that a tribunal would take years. **Crime is justified if that is the only way to infiltrate the evil that the law can't even see**."

The portal opens one more time, the smell of gunpowder oozes out from it. Out of the portal steps a man with a hard face, a black suit decorated with a big white skull on the chest. Frank Castle, The Punisher, enters the debate while holding an M16 rifle.

The Punisher: "Words. Lots of words. Too much philosophy for a group that lives in crystal castles and luxury mansions. **You speak of a hollow 'justice', and while you talk all the monsters are still breathing**."

Batman: "Frank Castle, we don't execute people around here."

The Punisher: "Your city is a graveyard with neon lights, Wayne. And you are an undertaker that refuses to bury the bodies. **Is it justified to break the law? That is the wrong question. The correct question is: How many innocent lives is the life of a killer worth? To me, the answer is none**. My 'crime' is getting rid of a disease. You are all surgeons that are afraid of seeing blood, while I'm the one that removes the tumor and burns it."

The Domino Lady: "There is a line between justice and butchery, Frank. I seek truth and reparation. **You only seek a body count**."

The Punisher: "Your old man died because the system was corrupt, I know. But while you go around wearing silk dresses and golden earrings, the men that gave the order to kill him are eating caviar in their mansions, unpunished. **Justice is, simply put, a bullet in the head of those who**

earned it. Any action is justified if it guarantees that a criminal while never hurt an innocent ever again."

Catwoman recoils in disgust.

Catwoman: "Bruce at least is right about something… there is no joy in what you do. Just a void."

The Punisher: "In the streets, if you get in the way of a bullet meant for a trafficker, you just become collateral damage. There is no honor among thieves when lead is flying. **Crime is justified when it is the final end of all crimes**."

The Green Hornet: "I've seen plenty of people like you in the streets of lowly neighborhoods. **You think that a bullet is a final solution, but all it creates is a vacancy for another criminal, younger, more ambitious, and more violent, to take its place**. You are not removing a tumor, Castle, you are hitting a wasp's nest with a hammer."

The Punisher: "When I pull the trigger, the monster dies. While you play at being a mobster, they are still doing business as usual, they are still killing innocents."

The Green Hornet: "That is the difference between a soldier and a strategist. You are fighting the symptoms but not the disease. **You kill the hitman; while I become his boss to dismantle the entire organization from the roots**. It's justified to break the law if you are clever about it. I'm wanted by the police, all the media calls me a criminal, and every mob boss believes I'm one of them. That is real power. Your methods, Frank, are just noise."

The Punisher: "Your method allows the killer to live one more day and keep on killing. My method guarantees that he can never kill anyone ever again."

The Green Hornet: "Your method is a statistical failure, Castle. **For every trafficker you kill, a legend is born in the streets and ten young men want to be like him. Crime is justified when it is used as a necessary spectacle**. I commit petty theft here and there to earn the trust of the big bosses, I sacrifice my own reputation to get long term results. What you seek is personal relief for your own anger. **Justice is not filling out a graveyard, it's a system that works because people like me do the dirty work to clean up the filth without anyone ever knowing who did it**."

The Punisher: “I don’t care about statistics, and I don’t care about tomorrow. **I care about who is holding the gun today**.”

The Green Hornet: “What you are looking for is not justice, is infinite never ending revenge. And that is just as dangerous as the crime you are trying to fight against. **It is justified to break the law in order to save the law, not to replace it with your own personal firing squad**.”

The dimensional portal opens up once again, letting out the smell of dry desert ground and black gunpowder. From the portal emerges a man dressed in a suit, cape and Cordoba style hat, all items of clothes black, a black mask covering the upper half of his face, and a sword hanging from his belt. Don Diego de la Vega, El Zorro, makes his grand entrance into the floor with a huge smile.

El Zorro: “I see that centuries may pass, but the dilemma of the human heart never change. Ladies and gentlemen… I hear you pronounce the words ‘crime’ and ‘justice’, but in my time, the law was the whip on the hands of a tyrannical governor. There was no tribunal to appeal, only the will of a man with an iron fist. **It is justified to break the laws of men when they contradict the laws of God and human dignity. If the law is a tool for oppression, then the ‘criminal’ is the only free man that’s left**.”

The Domino Lady: “You understand things well, Don Diego. My father was a victim of that same oppression, disguised as a modern democracy.”

El Zorro: “Be careful, Miss Patrick. I don’t look for treasure, nor do I seek bloody vengeance. **My sword marks the ‘Z’ not to avenge, but to shame the ones in power and remind them that the people are watching them. My ‘crime’ is giving a voice to those that didn’t have any**. The dangers of your path, Miss Patrick, and that of Mister Reid, is that hatred might end up staining the steel.”

Catwoman: “And what about wealth, Don Diego? You are an aristocrat just like Ellen, or like Bruce, or like Britt. How can you justify your double life?”

El Zorro: “My wealth is my alibi. It allows me to be invisible to the eyes of the tyrant. As Diego de la Vega I am just a harmless rich young man that loves poetry, and as El Zorro I am the nightmare of the unjust. **My disguise is justified because if I were to protest publicly, it would just bring me to the gallows before I could help even a single peasant**. But the

difference, Miss Kyle, is that I never stole to fill my own pockets, but to empty the pockets of those that stole from the people with unjust taxes."

Batman: "Nowadays, De la Vega, the chaos is even greater. **If every person decides what law is 'divine' or 'just' then we end up in anarchy**."

El Zorro smiles at Batman.

El Zorro: "**Anarchy is already among us, Mister Wayne, if we allow the wicked to govern unopposed. Crime is not justified by our own benefit, but by the sacrifice of our own name**. I am a criminal to the law of my time, but a hero to history."

The portal opens once again, letting out the smell of fine French perfume. From the portal emerges a man with clothes fancier than the feathers of a peacock, with a white powdered wig, and a silk coat that seems to shine. Sir Percy Blakeney, better known as The Scarlet Pimpernel, makes an elegant entrance to the debate.

The Scarlet Pimpernel: "Holy heavens! What a gloomy gathering. Bruce, that black ensemble is positively fatal. And you, Castle, with that skull you look like a pirate."

Batman: "Sir Percy Blakeney, the man that mocked the guillotine."

The Scarlet Pimpernel: "And I did it with style, my dear gentleman of the shadows. In my time, a 'crime' was simply having the wrong name, or a bank account too suspicious to the eyes of an angry mob. **It is justified to break the law when the law becomes a bloodthirsty butcher**. I don't steal diamonds to live, like the lovely Miss Kyle, nor do I seek personal revenge like Miss Patrick, **I steal lives from the grim reaper**."

The Domino Lady: "You save aristocrats and nobles, Sir Percy. I hunt down and steal from those that abuse that power. My 'crime' is a purge on that same social class you protected."

The Scarlet Pimpernel gives a wide smile.

The Scarlet Pimpernel: "Ah, but my dear Ellen, **abuse of power has no social class**. The tyranny of 'Freedom' in France after the revolution was as bloody as that of any monarch. **It is justified to use trickery and subterfuge for the 'crime' of smuggling people, when the state decides that justice is just sharp steel dropping on the necks of innocents. The law is not sacred if it is written with unjust blood**."

Catwoman: “But you only did it for sport. Isn’t that right, Sir Percy?”

The Scarlet Pimpernel: “For honor, little kitty! And for the pleasure of showing that cleverness will always be superior to brute force. **It is justified to be an ‘outlaw’ to the eyes of the entire world if that allows you to sleep with a clear conscience. Real justice is very sneaky… we look for it over here and over there, but only those that dare to laugh on the face of tyranny can find it**.”

El Zorro: “Well said, my brother in arms! The disguise is the shield of the just man.”

Batman: “**You all defend the end over the means**. But Sir Percy, even you know that when the chaos of the French Revolution was over, all that was left was a void. **Crime, even with good intentions, leaves wounds that nothing can hide**.”

The interdimensional portal opens up once again with a cold and somber sound, as one could hear the waves of the ocean and the smell of salt water. From its darkness steps out a man with a presence that demands silence. Wearing all black, but in a fabric so smooth that it looks almost liquid. His face is pale and rigid like a perfectly polished piece of marble, and his eyes seem to burn with a cold and calculating drive. Edmond Dantès, the Count of Monte Cristo, joins the rest in the room.

The Count of Monte Cristo: “I hear your yapping about ‘crime’ and ‘justice’. You talk about stealing diamonds, and marking a ‘Z’, or saving necks from the guillotine… that’s insignificant. **Real justice is not an act of impulse, it is a work of art that takes years to paint**.”

The Domino Lady: “Dantès, you were betrayed by the legal system, just like my father. You understand that the law is used by the powerful and the corrupt.”

The Count of Monte Cristo: “No, mademoiselle Patrick. **I understand that the law is a lie**. I was locked up in the Château d'If by the pen of a jealous prosecutor and the greed of a fake friend. **Is crime justified? No. What is justified is for men to take the place of Providence when God has forgotten about the innocent**. I did not ‘commit crimes’, I destroyed the financial, social and moral standings of men that believed they were above everything.”

Batman: “What you did was play at being God, Dantès. You manipulated lives, you ruined families, and you almost destroyed innocent lives in the process. **That is not justice, that is a pathology of control**.”

The Count of Monte Cristo gives batman a condescending stare.

The Count of Monte Cristo: “Are aren’t you the same, Batman? You stand vigilant atop the rooftops, deciding how gets beaten up and who gets thrown in jail. The difference is that I have the patience of a glacier. **It’s justified to break the laws of man if the objective is perfect retribution. Crime is merely a word that the guilty invented to protect themselves from the consequences of their actions**.”

Catwoman: “Look at yourself, Dantès. You have more riches and wealth than anyone here, but it is clear that your money did not buy you peace.”

The Count of Monte Cristo: “**Peace is for the dead. For the living all is left is ‘hope’ and ‘waiting’**. But while we wait, it is justified to use every coin, ever secret and every weakness in the system to dismantle the corrupt, and making them wish they were dead. If that makes me a criminal in your eyes, so be it. **I am the punishment that your laws didn’t dare to impose**.”

The Scarlet Pimpernel: “Oh my! Aren’t you a sour one. Maybe some forgiveness will do wonders for you.”

The Count of Monte Cristo: “**Forgiveness is for God, Sir Percy. I only take care of the preliminaries**.”

The Punisher: “The patience of a glacier? You are inefficient! **While you leave the guilty alive, they can continue to hurt more innocents or to retaliate**. A bullet to the head and that is it. All you do is a show of vanity.”

The Count of Monte Cristo looks at The Punisher with a cold stare.

The Count of Monte Cristo: “And your methods are vulgar, monsieur Castle. **Death is not a punishment, it’s a relief. A real punishment is absolute ruin, its seeing how everything you love and cherish becomes ashes while you are still breathing**.”

The Punisher: “**I don’t want them to suffer, I want them to stop existing. It is justified to break the law when the law becomes a refuge for the guilty**. I don’t wear this skull on my chest to hide who I am, I wear it so they know that death has come to get them.”

The portal opens up once again, a sound of wood against metal can be heard, and a man steps out dressed entirely in a red suit, the mask hides his eyes and two bumps on the mask's forehead look like tiny horns. He moves with feline reflexes, while holding a small battle stick. Matt Murdock, Daredevil, the man without fear, has entered the room to join the debate.

Daredevil: "I can hear the guilt in this room. I spent my whole life in Hell's Kitchen, a neighborhood where crime was commonplace every day. I have seen the poverty you speak of, Catwoman, and I have seen corruption like the one that killed Ellen Patrick's father. I am a lawyer by day, and I am Daredevil by night. But, **there is a fundamental difference between us and the scum we hunt: Faith. Not faith in a God, but faith that the idea of justice does not belong to us or to anyone else**."

Catwoman: "Bruce, it seems that your type comes in pairs. You are also going to say that the system works while people go hungry, Murdock?"

Daredevil: "The system is broken, Selina. I know that better than anyone, I have seen guilty man walk free over a technicality in court, technicalities that, as a lawyer, I know perfectly. But **it is justified to break the law when the objective is to preserve the spirit of justice, not to replace justice with our own will**. Frank believes that crime is justified with death, Ellen believes that is justified with compensation. **But when one takes law into their own hands, you kill the only hope that common men have: The idea that there are rules that protect us all equally**."

The Domino Lady: "And what hope can a common man have when the judge itself is the killer, like it happened with my father?"

Daredevil stops walking in front of The Domino Lady.

Daredevil: "I understand how you feel. My father was also killed by people that controlled the system. He was a boxer that refused to lose in a fixed fight. I could have looked for revenge, but I chose the law. I justify my actions as Daredevil of acting outside of the law only as a way to level the playing field, to bring the guilty into the light, not to become their judge, jury and executioner. **If crime is the answer to injustice, then justice no longer exists and all that is left is vengeance**."

Batman: "Murdock understands it."

The Punisher: "Understands what? **Murdock understands how to let criminals out the back door from jail thanks to a nice speech. His 'justice' is just a vicious cycle**."

Daredevil ignores The Punisher and walks towards Batman.

Daredevil: "Mister Wayne, we both know that fear is a tool, but it cannot be the basis. We cannot justify breaking the law for social status, or for personal tragedy, or for military efficiency. **Civil disobedience is justified to expose the truth, but the moment you cross the line and decide that your morals are above that of society, you have lost yourself**."

The Count of Monte Cristo: "You speak like a dreamer that still believes that the words written in a book of laws still have power over the soul of a betrayed man."

Daredevil: "They have the power that we give them, Dantès. Without them, this place is nothing but a cage of animals, fighting to see who has the bloodiest reason."

The portal opens up once more, letting out a smell of moisture and dirty streets. A man dressed in a black suit with a silk black cape, and black gloves with small pointy fins, a .45 caliber pistol on a holster at his hips, and a black cowl hiding scars around his eyes. Tony Quinn, better known as The Black Bat, makes his entrance.

The Black Bat: "I've heard enough, aristocrats, lawyers, thieves, and soldiers of the asphalt… you all justify your actions one way or another from the pain you all carry. Murdock, you speak about faith in the law; Castle, you speak about 'destroying the disease'. **But you all forget that the law is not a living entity… it's a tool, it's a weapon. And just like any tool or weapon, it can be wielded by the wrong hands**."

The Black Bat turns to look at Daredevil.

The Black Bat: "For me, crime is not justified by necessity or by ideology. It's justified as an act of necessary sabotage. **When the machinery of justice has been sabotaged from the inside by men like the ones that blinded me or those that killed Ellen Patrick's father, one cannot ask the machine to repair itself. One must throw a wrench in the gears**."

The Domino Lady: "Exactly, it's an aesthetic repair. To clean up all the filth and rot."

The Black Bat: "No, Miss Patrick. **It isn't aesthetic repair, it is emergency surgery**. I use the same methods as the criminals – fear, stealing evidence, infiltration, and firearms – not because I like to spread chaos like Miss Kyle, or because I'm looking for a body count like Mister Castle. **I do it because, as a prosecutor, I learned that for a case to be**

solid in the court of morality, sometimes one must go looking for evidence in hell. The 'crime' of being a vigilante is justified when the final objective is to return power to those that the law has abandoned."

Batman: "Quinn, you look for order. But your methods are a stain in your rank as a district attorney. **How can you call what you do justice, when you use terror as currency?**"

The Black Bat puts his hand over the holster of his gun.

The Black Bat: "Because terror is the only language that a corrupt system responds to, Mister Wayne. **Murdock wants men to believe in the law. I want for criminals to fear the shadow of the law**. It is justified to break the written law to save the principle that created it. If I must be a criminal in the eyes of the state to save an innocent man from the electric chair, I will do it in a heartbeat. But – and here is where I separate myself from Mister Dantès – I don't do it for my own glory or peace of mind. I do it because someone has to do the dirty work to balance the scales once again."

The Punisher: "At least you aren't a hypocrite, Quinn. You know that the system is a corpse."

The Black Bat: "A corpse that can still be reanimated, Mister Castle! But not with more blood, but with forced truth. **Breaking the law is justified if that is the only way to expose the real criminal hiding behind an official desk**."

The portal opens up one more time, with the sound of a distant thunder, and the smell of steel and leather. From the portal steps out a man that is pure muscle, and with scars that show the tale of hundreds of battles. His hair is long and black, and his blue eyes show the ferocity of a wolf. Conan the Barbarian takes the floor, with his broadsword on his belt and clear contempt on his face.

Conan the Barbarian: "Stop your rattle, you crows! You talk in this crystal tower about 'crime' like if it were smoke that you could grasp with your hands. In Cimmeria there are no 'laws' written by fat men that have never held a sword."

Batman: "You are a man out of time, Conan. **Now we rule ourselves by norms, not by brute force**."

Conan laughs at Batman.

Conan the Barbarian: "Norms? I've seen empires fall and civilizations rot under the weight of their very own 'norms'. You all debate about whether is okay to kill or plunder while your cities all sink in their decadence. Listen well, men of silk: **Crime does not exist. Only survival and the honor of steel exists**."

Catwoman: "Straight to the point, I like your style. But here, if you take what you want, they call you a criminal."

Conan the Barbarian: "**Weak men invented words like 'crime' to protect what they cannot defend with their own hands. You can take whatever you need if you have the strength to keep it**. But – pay close attention, civilized men – it is justified to spill blood only if there is honor behind the act. Killing for gold is for rats, killing for justice is for men. **If a king is a tyrant, it is the duty of every free man to sink a sword in his chest. That is not a crime, that is the natural cleansing of the world**."

Daredevil: "Conan, what you are describing is just anarchy. **Civilization is built over the abandonment of those impulses**."

Conan the Barbarian: "**Your civilization is nothing but a gilded cage**. You speak about these 'corrupt systems' as if they are gods. If the system is unjust, the squash it! If a man steals your life, then take his. You don't need judges or attorneys that take gold to say who is right or wrong. **Violence is justified if the alternative is the enslavement of the spirit. A man that asks permission to be free does not deserve freedom**."

The Punisher: "The barbarian makes more sense that all the lawyers in this room."

Conan the Barbarian: "You have fire in your eyes, soldier, but you are a prisoner of your own hatred. And you, in the bat costume, you waste your life trying to save a city that is already dead. **In my land, when a tree is rotten we cut it out and burn it so something new can grow. Breaking the law is justified when the law becomes a chain that prevents a man from owning his own destiny**."

The portal opens up once again, with the light of a sunset over the South American Pampas, and from its depths emerges a man tanned by the sun and the wind. He is wearing an old poncho over his shoulders and a long gaucho knife on his belt. Martin Fierro looks around the room with tired eyes and a look of distrust.

Martin Fierro: “So many words from people that don’t know the hunger and coldness of a night in the desert. I have heard talking from the lawyers and the nobles. **You all speak of the law as if it were a coat that warms everyone equally, but the law is like rain: If you have a roof it refreshes you, and if you don’t then it rots you**.”

Catwoman: “Finally, someone that makes sense.”

Martin Fierro: “I don’t seek crime because I enjoy it, or for ‘aesthetics’ like the woman in the fancy mask. It is justified for a man to become an ‘outlaw’ when **justice is a funnel: The wide part for the rich and the narrow end for those that have nothing**. I became ‘bad’ because my family, and my freedom, were taken from me, and they sent me to the frontier to die for a war that wasn’t mine.”

Daredevil: “Fierro, I understand your pain, but if every man wronged by the states becomes a fugitive, then society collapses.”

Martin Fierro: “**Society already has collapsed for me, mister. The ‘crime’ of desertion is justified when the government is after you just because you are poor. When you are born a gaucho, you are born with the sentence already passed**. We are not criminals by choice, we are criminals by discard. I don’t kill for conviction like the man with the skull on the chest, nor do I do it for eternal revenge like the Count. I kill so I don’t get killed myself, and I steal so as to take back just a little of what a justice of peace took away from me with a signed parchment.”

Batman: “Your fight is against a system that never gave you a chance. But a knife in your hands can’t be the only answer.”

Martin Fierro looks at Batman then at Conan the Barbarian.

Martin Fierro: “You fight for an ideal, and you fight for glory. **A gaucho fights for his right to be a person. Breaking the law is justified when the law is used to herd men like cattle**. But listen well, the man that lives running away never knows peace. **I don’t defend crime, I defend the dignity of the persecuted**. If the world were a just place, then I would be in my ranch with my wife and kids.”

Catwoman: “You know what, Fierro… in a room full of people talking about ‘principles’ of ‘providence’ and of ‘divine justice’ you are the first one that speaks a truth I can feel for myself.”

Martin Fierro: “It is a truth one learns by force, young miss, when the stomach rumbles and the judge writes with the hand of the landowner.”

Catwoman: “Exactly. This ‘heroes’ (she says gesturing to Batman, Daredevil and The Black Bat) believe the world is a tribunal where everyone gets a lawyer. **They don’t understand what is like is to be born with the debt already collected**. It is justified to break the law, Fierro, because for people like us, private property was the first crime. **The law takes away our right to exists, and then calls us thieves when we try to take back just a little piece of what belongs to us for the simple fact of being alive**.”

Batman: “Selina, don’t compare your kleptomania with the tragedy of a man that lost his freedom at the frontier.”

Catwoman: “Be quiet Bruce! You were born wrapped around in silk blankets, he was born under the stars because he was never given an option. **It is justified to be ‘bad’ like he says, when being ‘good’ means starving away in a corner. If the law is used to herd men like cattle, then jumping the fence is not a crime, it’s an obligation**.”

Martin Fierro: “I see that you understand what it’s like to walk against the wind. **For the one that has nothing, even the air he breathes seems like something he owes**.”

Catwoman: “That is why I steal. Not for some poetic vengeance. I do it because every jewel I take from a safe it’s a slap on the face of a system that believes it can have everything while others don’t even have a roof over their heads. **Crime is justified as an act of redistribution**. If they have laws, then we have quicker hands. **At least we both don’t go around pretending we are saints, all we want is for the world to stop chocking us**.”

Conan looks at Martin Fierro and Catwoman.

Conan the Barbarian: “Listen carefully. Your mistake is waiting for the law to someday become just. **Justice is not something you get from the hands of a man holding a book; it is something you take by the sword. That is the price of freedom. Breaking the law is justified if that means living standing up while the rest live on their knees**.”

The portal opens up one more time, letting out a smell of wood, wet dirt and bonfires. From the portal emerges a man with an honest look, dressed in worn leathers and a green tunic. A long bow on his back and a quiver full of arrows. Robin Hood makes his entrance to the debate.

Robin Hood: “I hear your complaints about laws and property. In Sherwood we learned something quite simple: **The law of men is just parchment that burns, but the law of necessity is the one that rules**. Is it justified to become a criminal and break the law? **Crime does not exist if what you are doing is throwing a lifeline to someone who is drowning**. My ‘thefts’ are not a sin; it’s the recovery of the bounty that the crown took from the people. **The crime is not stealing gold from the bishop; the crime is that the bishop has gold while the people have no bread**.”

El Zorro: “Welcome, brother of the woods! Your bow and my sword speak the same language. Rebellion is justified when the sovereign becomes a tyrant. **We remind the powerful that justice isn’t something they bestow, it’s something that the people take by force if necessary**.”

Martin Fierro walks to Robin Hood.

Martin Fierro: “I understand you, man of the forest. You don’t steal for vice. You steal to protect the rights of your people. I can see that you know what it’s like to be persecuted by a government that only remembers you to take from you, or to send you to war. **Your bow and my knife are the only friends we are left when we have no shelter**.”

The Domino Lady: “I understand your cause, Robin. But your methods are not very… selective. **You steal from ‘the rich’ in general. I prefer precision. I don’t steal from the wealthy, I steal from those whose wealth came from corruption**. What I do is justified because it is directed to a person with a name. I am the poison in the cup of the corrupt, you are a storm that sweeps everyone with privilege.”

Robin Hood: “Lady Patrick, **you seek to punish the individual; I seek to save the community**. If the system is a sick forest, it is not enough to just cut down a few rotten branches, one must make sure that all the trees have enough water. **My crimes are justified because they are not my own: They are the act of a whole people that refuse to die of hunger**.”

Batman: “Robin Hood, your legend is probably the reason why many in this room do what they do. But there is a difference between your time and the present world we are trying to build. You acted in a vacuum where a monarch was the absolute law. **Today, if we justify theft based in the subjective ‘necessity’ of every person, we would destroy the social contract**.”

Robin Hood smiles.

Robin Hood: “What contract, my good sir? My people didn’t sign anything. **Those contracts that you talk about are usually written by the same hand that holds the whip**.”

Batman: “I can understand rebellion against tyranny, but one cannot build a civilization on permanent theft. **If you steal from a prince today, what is stopping from a peasant to steal from his neighbor claiming the same necessity?** I work in the shadows, true, but I do it so the institutions can work, not to replace them by a monarchy of outlaws, as noble as they may be.”

Daredevil: “Bruce is right about the danger, Robin, but I hear something else in your voice. I hear the justice of the Old Testament. As a lawyer, it pains me to admit, that there are laws that are a sin in and on themselves.”

Robin Hood: “The blind man sees more than the bat, it seems.”

Daredevil: “Don’t misunderstand me. Your disobedience was justified because the system of Nottingham was a system of death. But the line is too thin. One can justify crime when it is an act of extreme mercy, not when it becomes a lifestyle. **My worries are that by stealing from ‘the rich’ you are assuming that all wealth is the fruit of evil. Real justice requires a trial, evidence, and a defense. You only use arrows. We can justify to break the law to save a man, but if you break the law too often, you end up breaking the man you are trying to save**.”

Batman: “**Robin Hood, you fight against a system that has no salvation. But I fight for one that can still be saved**. That is the real difference.”

As the dimensional portal opens up once again, a man steps out dressed in green, with a hood and a mask. Blonde hair on his head and a small goatee on his jaw. He wields a bow and a quiver of a large variety of strange arrows. Oliver Queen, *Green Arrow*, makes his entrance.

Green Arrow: “Well, what a nice speech, Bruce. Easy to say when you were born with a silver spoon in your mouth.”

Batman: “What do you mean, Oliver?”

Green Arrow: “That someone has to keep their feet on the ground. Martin Fierro and Robin Hood are right. You speak from a pedestal made of money while a butler serves you breakfast in bed and does your laundry. **You and Daredevil fill your mouths with the ‘sanctity of the law’ like if the law was something that came down from the heavens, but the law is something written by men wearing a thousand dollar suits and that**

never had to choose between eating a meal or paying rent. Your conviction in the system is a luxury, Bruce. You don't want to admit that your precious system is designed to protect people like you, and not the people in the streets."

Batman: "**Then all is relative?** You want us to do things like The Punisher or the Count of Monte Cristo?"

Green Arrow: "No way! Castle is a psychopath and the Count thinks he's God. **I am talking about something harder, moral disobedience. I believe that it is justified to break the law as a form of necessary protest**. It is justified if that is the only way to make the people on top to look down."

Batman: "We can't live in a society without order, Oliver."

Green Arrow: "**And you cannot rule over someone if you are ignoring their suffering at the same time**. I am not talking about chaos, I am talking about disobedience with a purpose. If a law is protecting a bank that evicts a hundred families, that that law is the real crime. Breaking it is not 'revenge' it is balance. **I don't want divine justice, Bruce, I want for the poor man of the alleyway to have the same opportunities so as to not end up as a criminal**."

Green Arrow turns his head to look at Martin Fierro, then looks back at *Batman.*

Green Arrow: "**It's justified to be an 'outlaw' when the system becomes so rigid that it leaves no room for human decency**. If in order to save a community I have to burn a 'legal' but unjust contract, then I'll do it and I'll sleep soundly, because that is my moral duty as a free man. **The law is for the man, not the man for the law**."

The portal opens up one more time, with the sound of clanking metal and the smell of cold steel and sea water. From the portal emerges an imposing figure, dressed in a dark naval uniform, but with no insignia of any nation. A dark and full beard on his face, as his eyes seem to burn with cold fire of the fury of the oceans. Captain Nemo, master of the Nautilus, looks across the room with contempt.

Captain Nemo: "Look at yourselves. You debate over laws and justice as if that grain of sand called 'civilization' were the whole universe. You speak about crimes against the state, and against your fellow man… but you

forget that **the greatest criminal is civilization itself**. That machine of oppression that you, even the rebellious ones, want to save or reform."

Batman: "Nemo, you isolated yourself from the entire world in the bottom of the sea to fight your personal war. Are you going to tell us that the only justice is exile?"

Captain Nemo: "All of you, Zorro, Fierro, Robin Hood, the barbarian… are all tied to the land. I have broken all ties. Civilization is merely savagery varnished in silver. **To me, crime does not exist because I reject every law of every nation**. In the Nautilus, I am the law and I am the justice. I sink ships that transport slaves and ships that destroy cities, vessels belonging to the great empires of the world, as a form of planetary hygiene. El Zorro and Robin Hood **limit themselves by fighting against tyrants, while I destroy the throne, the caste, and its foundations**. It is purification by fire."

Daredevil: "**What you are doing is replacing their tyranny with your own**. You have appointed yourself as the only just man on the face of the Earth. You have renounced to your own humanity, Nemo."

Captain Nemo: "Humanity is what builds prisons and weapon factories, blind man."

Batman: "But it also deserves the chance to be better. **If you destroy the world because it's imperfect, that is not justice; it's being the executioner of hope**."

Captain Nemo: "**Civilization is responsible for the same fires that consume it**, Batman, I merely am the results of their evil made flesh. **You can try to save the ashes if that is what you want, meanwhile I'll destroy what caused the fire**."

Multiple portals open up all at once, taking each and every person back to their time and place in their respective worlds. In just a blink of an eye, the room is completely empty.

THE END